JULY 1948 1/6

he GEOGRAPHICAL MAGAZINE

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Pelote: Game of the Basques

by RODNEY GALLOP

Mr Gallop is the leading British authority on the Basques. Brought up in the French Basque country, he has travelled widely on both sides of the frontier studying their mysterious language, history and customs. His Book of the Basques *is recognized as the standard work on the subject*

In cities as widely separated as Brussels, Cairo, Shanghai, Manila, Buenos Aires and Havana, the observant globe-trotter may have seen a game variously known as *frontón* or *jai alai*. It will have seemed to him to be a kind of glorified fives, played with a long, curved basket glove in a large, covered court lacking a wall only on the right-hand side where the spectators sit in tiers. In his travel notes he will have remarked both on the speed, grace and athletic vigour of the players and on the orgies of impassioned betting to which the game gives rise. If he is of an inquiring mind, he will have discovered that most of the players are Basques from the western slopes of the Pyrenees and that the game itself is a form of Basque pelote.

The names fronton and jai alai are in fact misnomers. It is rather as if, in suffering a sea change, cricket had been rechristened "pitch" or "Lords". A frontón is really the place where pelote is played and Jai Alai (Basque for "gay festival") was originally the name of one particular frontón at San Sebastian. Further inquiries, therefore, must be pursued in the home of the game in the Basque provinces of France and Spain.

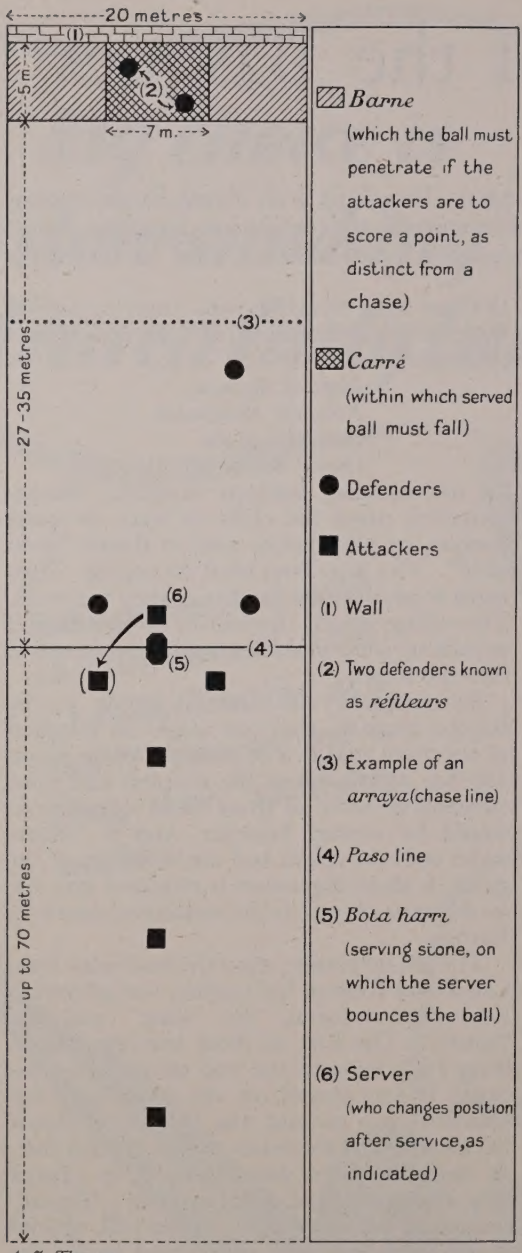
The Basque country stretches roughly from Bayonne in France to Bilbao in Spain and extends little more than fifty miles inland from the Atlantic. In proportion to its size the scenery is richly varied, and no less varied are the differing forms in which the game is played, ranging from small boys knocking a ball up against the church wall when the priest's back is turned (though I have even seen him join in with them) to the spectacular *remonte* matches at San Sebastian and Bilbao. Among all these variants, there are two main, intersecting lines of division: that which distinguishes games played against a wall like fives from those played up and down the court like tennis; and that which distinguishes games played with the bare hand from those played with some form of striking surface. All that they have in common is their popularity. Every village has at least one pelote court, generally close to the church and the inn and forming with these a sort of triptych of community life. An old Basque jingle runs:

Haurrak ikasazue
Eskuaraz mintzatzen
Ikas' pilotan eta
Oneski dantzatzen.

In the ancient, perhaps neolithic, Basque tongue it urges the child to learn to speak Basque, to play pelote and to dance "honestly". The little boys need no urging. They learn to play almost as soon as they can walk. The village priests themselves do not disdain to tuck up their soutanes and fling themselves into the fray.

So completely at home is pelote in the Basque country, that one might be tempted to conclude that it is of purely Basque origin and has grown out of the simplest and most elementary form of fives. Both conclusions would be wrong, however, and to understand both the origin and the evolution of the game, a short digression is required into the *jeu de paume* played at the mediaeval courts of Europe.

The jeu de paume, directly descended from Greek and Roman ball-games, was played in two distinct forms, the "long" and the "short". The first of these reached France from Italy towards the end of the 13th century. It was played on any reasonably flat piece of open ground, the ball being struck backwards and forwards over a central line. In time, this *longue paume* came to be played in a more restricted space such as a tiltyard, stables or even refectory. Later still, special spaces were enclosed and roofed in for the game. The four walls and the restricted space gave rise to new rules, those of the so-called *courte paume*. (The first word of this name has survived in our English tennis-court.) Like the modern village pelote court, these mediaeval courts for the courte paume varied both in size and in natural hazards. Eventually the individual features of one such court, possibly the royal one, were generally adopted, surviving today in our real tennis court (as at Hampton Court) and in the



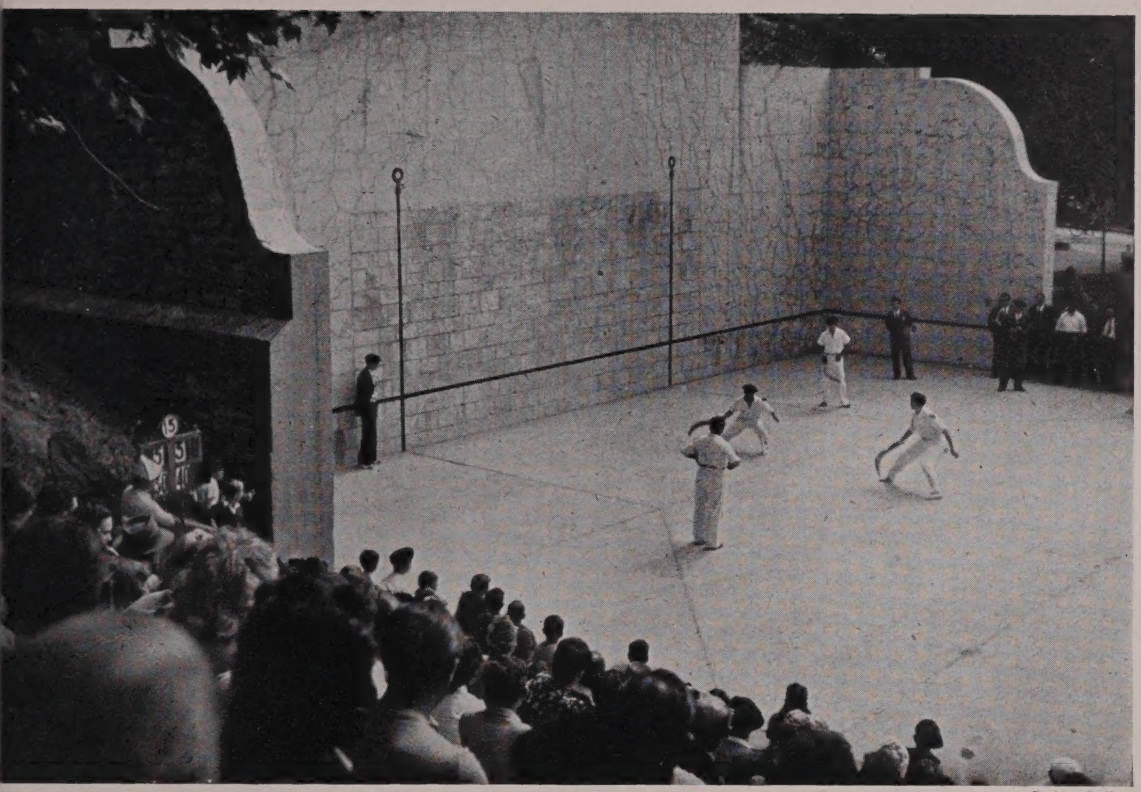
A. J. Thornton

Basque pelote is marked, today, by a great revival of interest in the rebot *form in which the wall is scarcely used, except for service, the ball being hit up and down the court across a* paso *line, as in its ancestor, the mediaeval* jeu de paume. *From the latter, rebot (a difficult game for the novice to follow) has inherited a complicated system of attack and defence with points and chases which require more tactical skill than the games in which every ball is hit against a wall. The above plan shows the court and players at the moment of service*

closed *trinquets* of the Basque country. Some casual roof was the origin of the pent-house, and the *dedans*, the *grille* and the *tambour* are thought originally to have been a wired-off poultry run, a serving-hatch and a chance irregularity in the wall. The method of scoring 15, 30, 45 arose from a rule permitting the server, who started forty-five *pieds du roi* from the middle, to approach fifteen paces for each point scored. The jeu de paume became so popular in France that Sir Robert Dallington exclaimed that there were more courts in France than drunkards in England.

It is the distinction of Basque pelote that, while other games such as lawn-tennis descend from the courte paume, pelote is directly descended from the earlier longue paume. Beyond a few travellers' accounts of the popularity of ball games among the Basques through the ages, it is not until the end of the 18th century that the recorded history of the game begins. The three forms in which it was then played, known respectively as *bota luzea*, *lachoa* and *mahi-jokoa*, did not differ in their essentials from the longue paume. They are scarcely played today, but lachoa has left vigorous progeny in the game of *rebot* which is not only maintaining but increasing its popularity.

Rebot is less spectacular and more complicated and difficult to follow than the games based on fives, but it exhibits more tactical skill and intelligence. It requires a long court with a wall which is used only in the service. A line called the *paso* is drawn across the court 32 metres or more from the wall. On it stands the *bota harri* or serving stone. There are two teams of five players each, the serving side attacking the end with the wall, which the striking side defend. The server bounces the ball on the bota harri and serves with his bare hand, aiming at striking the wall at its junction with the ground, or as close to the ground as possible. The ball must fall within the *carré*. Two of the defending side known as *réfileurs* stand near the wall armed with curved basket gloves and take the ball on the rebound, striving to hit it high and far down to the other end where their opposite numbers return it on the volley or first bounce. Scoring is more or less as in tennis with match at thirteen games. The defending side score a point in the case of a fault, a miss or a ball falling outside the court. The attacking side score a point if the ball falls out or penetrates the area at the foot of the wall known as the *barne*. But as in real tennis there is a complicated system of chases. A chase (*arraya*) is a kind of suspended point which can be scored only by the attacking side. This happens if the defenders fail to



Rodney Gallop

Return of service in a rebot *game. The service has been struck so that it falls within the* carré. *As it rebounds from the wall the two* réfileurs *move with it. Which of them returns it depends on the bound—*

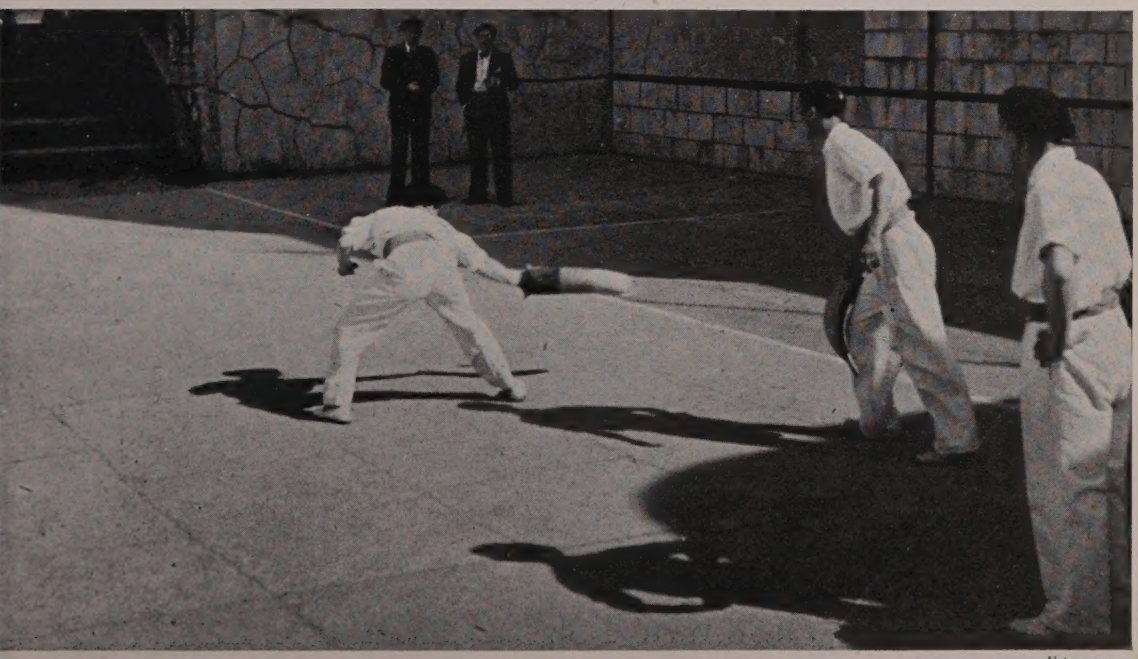


Foto Moreau

—of the ball. A ball which strikes the junction of the wall and the ground generally proves a service ace. In both photographs the ball has bounced easily and will be returned high and far down the court

Rodney Gallop

Pelota mixteca *is played by Mixtec Indians of Zaachila, Mexico. This game bears no resemblance to the pre-Conquest ball game of the Ancient Mayas but descends from the mediaeval* longue paume

return the service or if, between the paso and barne lines, the ball is touched or stopped or crosses the side-line along the ground. In order to "convert" a chase, the sides change ends and the paso line is regarded as passing through the point where the ball went out of play. All the ex-attackers need now do is to make the ball cross the new and much nearer line, a relatively easy task. This all gives rise to spirited rallies near the centre, and has its effect on the tactics of the game. Since the defending side is relatively better placed to score points outright than the attacking side, it may be better tactics for them to leave a ball, and lose a point, rather than to stop it, in attempting a return, thus risking a "chase" which will involve a change of ends and the loss of the favourable defenders' position.

In an article on Yucatan published in *Lilliput*, Mr Tom Driberg suggests that pelote is derived from the ball-game of the ancient Mayas and Aztecs. Unfortunately, this ignores not only the history of the jeu de paume before the Conquest (it is mentioned in French literature exactly 200 years earlier) but also the character of the native Mexican game. The accounts of early Spanish missionaries leave no doubt that *tlachtli* (to give it its Aztec name) was quite different. The ball was struck with the knee, hip or elbow and the aim was to make it pass through a stone ring set high on either side-wall. Failing this feat (which was accomplished as rarely as a goal in the Eton wall-game, and which entitled the successful player to seize the clothes and all the belongings of the spectators), the ball could be carried to the far end, scoring something like a try in Rugby football. A game called *pelota mixteca*, however, still survives in the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, which is clearly derived from the longue paume. As I saw it played at Zaachila, there are two teams of four players, the ball is struck with the hand and the system of chases is identical even down to the name (*raya*) with that in the archaic forms of Basque pelote. It is clear that the Conquerors succeeded in substituting the European game for that which the Indians had played before the Conquest and which was closely tied up with their religious ritual.

Basque pelote in the manifold forms in which we know it today is the result of an evolution which took place almost entirely within the 19th century. These changes were due to two factors; the invention of new and improved striking surfaces, and the introduction of a rubber core which made the ball far faster and livelier than before.

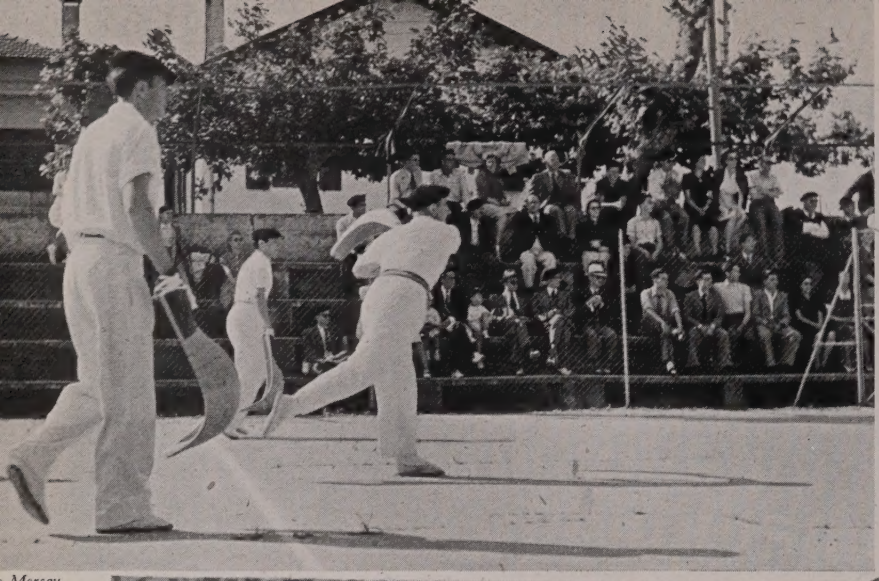
As long ago as in the days of the jeu de paume players had tended to use some form of leather glove. This not only protected the hand and avoided the deep bruise called *clou* which is still today the bane of the bare-hand player, but enabled the ball to be hit harder and with a greater degree of slice. In the Basque country, at the end of the 18th century, the leather glove had assumed the form of a sort of shallow scoop fastened to the hand with glove fingers. In the first half of the 19th century, these scoops gradually increased in length. Gloves of this type are still used by the *cordiers*, those rebot players whose special task it is to take part in the exchanges near the line. In the early 'fifties, the miller of Mauléon introduced a still longer glove with a slight lip enabling the ball to be held for a split second before being slung back. A more powerful and accurate shot called *atchiki* (to hold) to distinguish it from the old *chirrista* or slice was the result.

These new gloves, however, were both heavy and expensive, which made people set themselves to think out some form of lighter and cheaper striking surface. Some took a three-pronged wooden fork, cut off the handle, tied the prongs together and filled in the intervening space with a rough string mesh to make the most primitive racket on record. Others tried to make do with a sieve frame, cut into three and fastened to the wrist with a handkerchief. Neither of these inventions proved serviceable, but it was something on these lines which eventually transformed the game more than any other single step.

One day, in the French Basque village of St Pée, a boy called Gantchiki Dithurbide was knocking up with his companions. His father manufactured a type of long wicker basket called *chistera* used for gathering fruit

Musée Basque, Bayonne

The evolution of the basket glove: (1) Scoop-shaped leather glove, late 18th century, (2) Leather glove, mid 19th century, (3) Leather glove, extreme development, (4) Original chistera, *(5) Modern chistera, used in the "small"* atchiki *game, (6) Modern chistera, used in the "big" atchiki game*



The development of the basket glove, or chistera, *during the last hundred years has greatly added to the spectacular quality of Basque pelote and, by giving greater length to the stroke, has favoured the games against a wall rather than older up-and-down types. The deeply curved basket glove used in the "big"* atchiki *game* (left) *allows the ball—*

Moreau

Rodney Gallop

Foto More

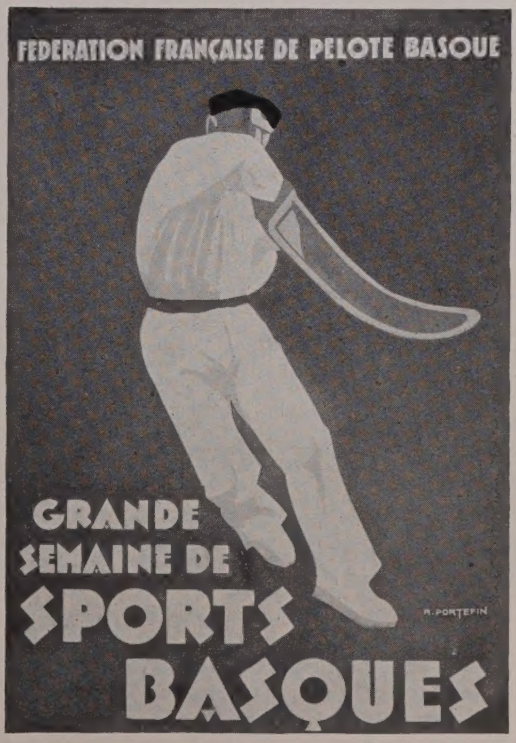
—to be briefly retained before being slung out. Overhead shots, impossible with the heavy-type chistera, play a prominent part in the faster "small" atchiki game (above), *in which the ball is instantaneously sliced with a lighter and less curved form of the basket glove.* (Right) *Basque priests play a vigorous game despite their long soutanes*

and vegetables. In fun Gantchiki played a stroke or two with one of these baskets fastened to his arm. Thus was born the chistera basket glove which has since gone round the world, quite displacing the old leather glove.

These developments coincided with the new and faster ball, and between them made many of the existing pelote courts too short. At St Pée, for instance, there was a house at the far end of the court. It did not much matter if the ball hit the front, for the laws of rebot allow a ball to be taken on the rebound at either end: but when people began to hit the ball right over it, something had to be done. This something was the introduction of the practice of hitting every ball against the wall in fives fashion instead of hitting up and down as in the jeu de paume. The innovation was strenuously opposed by the supporters of the older games, and on many frontóns notices were put up forbidding it. But the hands of the clock were not to be put backwards, and it was the frontóns themselves that had to give way. The small wall which had hitherto sufficed for service in the rebot game was too small for the new fashion. Frontón walls were enlarged, and in many courts it is still possible to see the old wall clearly framed in the new masonry which was now built on.

The evolution of pelote was far from being arrested with these developments. The game up against the wall provided a strong stimulus to the bare-hand players who were tending to be confined to the closed trinquets and the up-and-down game called *pasaka*. Even with the modern ball the dreaded clou on the hand was no more to be feared than the injury which the new chisteras tended to inflict on the arm muscles. Today inter-village matches *à main nue* furnish not only the common denominator of all other games but have a classical quality all their own which none of the more spectacular but more specialized, not to say professional, games ever quite attain.

In the latter part of the 19th century professionalism influenced the evolution of other branches of the game. Even with the new chisteras the back-hand remained a purely defensive shot. Then, in 1888, Melchior Curuchague, playing in Buenos Aires, broke his wrist. In order not to lose his livelihood he had an exceptionally long and curved chistera made, with which he played back hand, using his left hand to support his weakened right. This stroke proved so effective that it became the basis of a new game called "big" atchiki to distinguish it from the "small" atchiki This game has remained almost exclusively professional and under its Spanish name of *cesta punta* has found favour in various parts of the world. In both forms of atchiki the ball is taken near the tip of the chistera and retained for a varying period of time. In the Basque provinces of Spain, however, spectators prefer the game of remonte, perhaps the fastest and most spectacular of all, in which the stroke is the old chirrista, an instantaneous slice in which the ball is taken at the wrist end of the chistera and an almost fantastic quantity of spin is thereby imparted. Another game of fives type which is just beginning to spread from Spain into France is that of *pala*, played with a long thin bat not unlike a cross-section of an Indian club. To these hard-hitting Spanish developments of the game against the wall, added interest is lent by the presence in all Spanish courts of a left-hand side-wall.



Portefin's magnificent design, used each year for the poster of the Week of Basque Pelote, depicts the back-hand stroke with a big chistera *in which the left arm supports the right. This stroke, invented sixty years ago by Melchior Curuchague after he had broken his right wrist, has influenced the evolution of the game*

Rodney Gallop

The monument to the F.F.I. at Sare symbolizes the value of pelote in physical training. On a pelote player in low relief is superimposed a Basque grenade thrower—the best in all France

Meanwhile, in France the small atchiki game is still more popular than the big everywhere except on the tourist-ridden coast. The basket used in this game and in rebot is less curved than Curuchague's big chistera, the tip of which is practically at a right-angle to the arm.

The detailed annals of the game go back only about 150 years. Up to the end of the 18th century only a name or two survives from the mists of the past. But from the French Revolution till today the great names follow one another like a dynasty: the almost legendary Perkain; Gaskoina who triumphed barefoot over the nails his opponents scattered beneath his feet to win the Irungo Partida of 1846, perhaps the most famous international match ever played; Mathieu Borotra, a relative of the "bounding Basque"; Chiquito d'Eibar, Paysandu and Porteño who distinguished himself at more different forms of the game than anyone before or since; Mondragones, the finest main nue player in living memory; Irigoyen who excelled at remonte; Chiquito de Cambo, in his youth one of the game's finest players, in his old age the prima donna of the big chistera; Urruty and Abrego, the heroes of today; not to mention famous families of brothers like the three Dongaitzes of Urrugne and the four Atanos of Navarre. Regulated by the Federation of Basque Pelote, the game today is an integral part of Basque life. Tribute is paid alike to the great players of the past in the plaque on the frontón of Urrugne; and to the part played by pelote in making Basques the best grenade throwers in all France, in the war memorial to the Resistance Movement erected in 1947 at Sare.

Above all, pelote provides perhaps the finest spectacle of all ball-games, and has inspired innumerable artists on both sides of the frontier. For poetry of movement, one scarcely knows which most to admire, the classical vigour and simplicity of a village bare-handed game, or the more virtuoso grace and perfection of timing of the faster games with chistera or pala. All alike embody in the highest degree the poetry of motion and aesthetic values which are, in the highest sense of the word, Olympian.

Ian M. Thomson

Nest-Building in East Anglia

Notes by E. A. ELLIS

East Anglia is famed for its bird life and during the nesting season birds occupy all its most charming territory from Constable's country to the desolate Wash. While nightingales chug at Flatford Mill, stone curlews wail in Breckland and redshanks sweeten solitude on the green levels and salt flats estuary-ward, the fast-growing reed beds of the Norfolk Broads are filled with the gossip of warblers at dusk and dawn. (Above) *A black-headed gull; these birds seize certain rush-grown inland waters for their own and build there half-floating nests of rush and sedge, often close together, in colonies a thousand strong in some places. Their aggressive habits make them unpopular with wardens of bird sanctuaries and they are not encouraged to invade new grounds*

S. C. Porter

(Left) *Herons build their vas twiggy nests gregariously i tree-tops, like rooks. They ofte choose Scots pines for this, bu tall, ancient alders are occupie at times in the swamp-woods or carrs, of East Anglia Nesting begins in February and by early June the youn birds, even more leggy an awkward than their parents begin to wade in dyke and tide way and to 'pick' their frogs tiddlers and aquatic insect*

(Right) *The sedge warbler, a songster of merit, abounds in all the bushy wildernesses of East Anglian river valleys. By its pale eye-stripe and dark-flecked crown it can be distinguished from the more uniformly pale brown reed warbler. While the latter weaves a deep cup-nest about the reed stems, the sedge warbler builds less tidily and is content to find a site in almost any kind of mixed tangle of fen vegetation*

Ian M. Thomson

. C. Porter

(Left) *The moorhen or 'water-hen', as it is called in East Anglia, is a bird of ponds. It likes to occupy the innumerable marl pits which were dug for agricultural purposes a century and a half ago all over this part of the country and are now derelict, half filled with water and weeds and surrounded by bushes. Young moorhens of an earlier brood often assist their parents to 'mind' and feed later-hatched nestlings*

(Right) *The little grebe, unlike the moorhen, is extremely shy and secretive. Its nest is a swampy, untidy raft made of water weeds and mud; on leaving it the bird usually covers its eggs with some of the outlying material. It frequents small inland pools and the upper reaches of rivers, and is expert at diving and catching little fish, as well as pursuing whirligig beetles and the smaller kinds of water-boatmen*

All Kodachromes by arrangement with "The New Naturalist"

S. C. Porter

Kodachrome by F. S. Smythe

Ready to load a Junkers float-plane at Fort St James. This type of aircraft and its land prototype, the Norseman (with a wheel or a ski undercarriage), are used extensively in Northern Canada

Unmapped and Unexplored

An Expedition to the Lloyd George Mountains of North-East British Columbia

by F. S. SMYTHE

Mr Frank S. Smythe has climbed mountains for thirty years in Britain, the Alps, the Himalayas and the Rockies, and his camera has always accompanied him. He has written twenty-one books on mountaineering. Mr Smythe's most notable expeditions were two new routes up Mont Blanc without guides, six expeditions to the Himalayas, including three to Mount Everest, and two to the Rockies

The range of the Canadian Rocky Mountains between Mount Assiniboine in the south and Mount Robson in the north has been largely explored and mapped by travellers, topographers and mountaineers. Of the country north of Mount Robson, however, where the same sedimentary limestone formations continue for some 550 miles, far less is known; and the area north of the Peace River, between the Alaska Highway and the Liard, Kechika and Finlay rivers, constitutes some 25,000 square miles of mountains mostly unmapped and unexplored.

The original exploration of Canada was carried out largely by canoe, and the pioneers who followed the Peace River and its principal tributary, the Finlay River, in order to trade in furs with the local Indians, established posts at Fort Grahame and Fort Ware.

Little was then known of the mountains to

the east and west of the Finlay River. This comprises some of the wildest and most remote country in North America, a complicated tangle of ranges between 8000 and 9000 feet in elevation, and deep tortuous valleys, filled with dense spruce forests, down which tumultuous glacial rivers dash through savage canyons.

Towards the end of the last century trappers, prospectors and Indians brought back tales of high mountains and extensive icefields north-east of Fort Ware, and in 1893 R. G. McConnell of the Canadian Geological Survey ascended the Kwadacha River, a tributary of the Finlay, to the junction of the Warneford River, looking up which he observed a lofty snow-clad range.

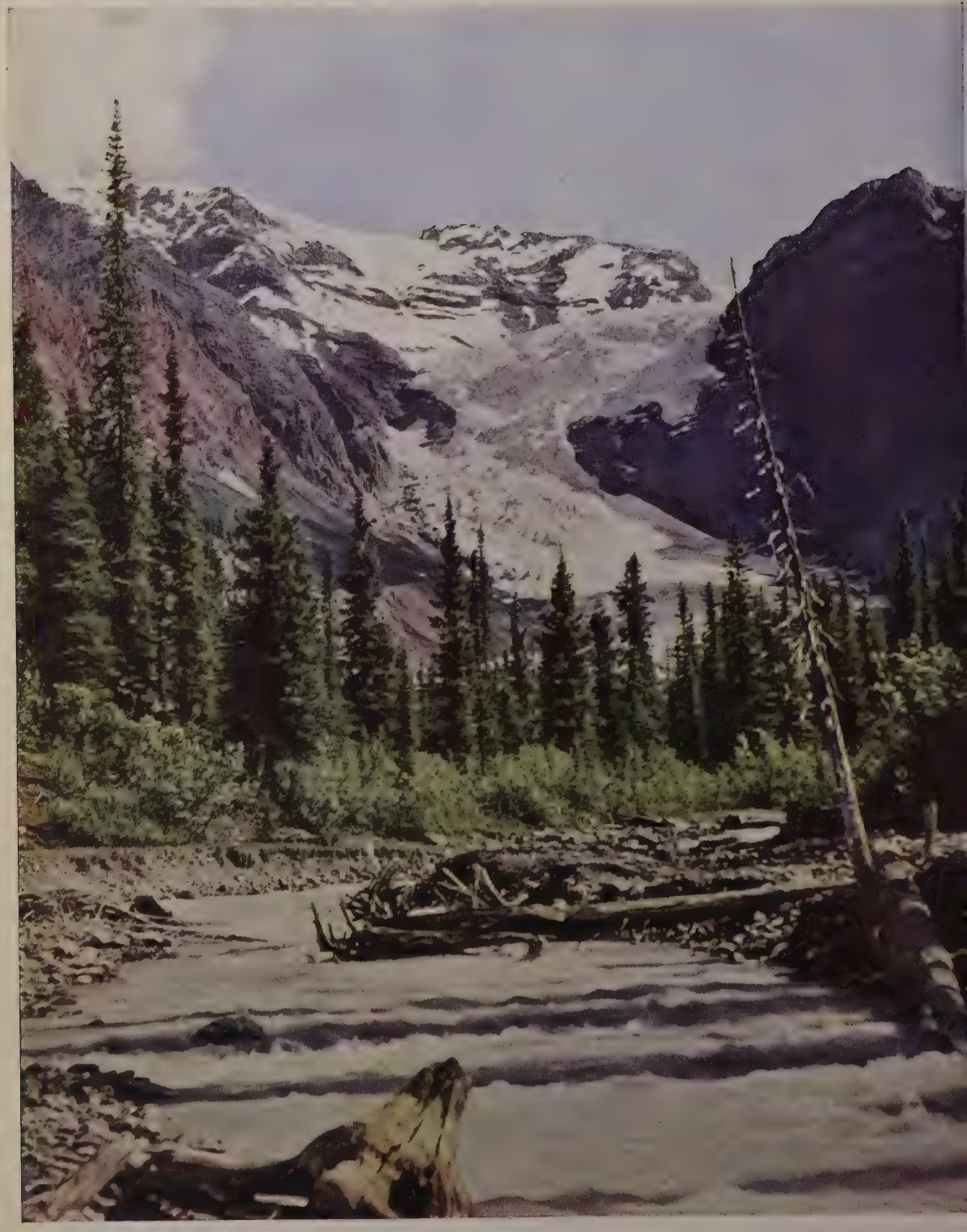
Nothing more was done until 1914 when Frank Swannell of the British Columbia Land Survey fixed the position of this range by means of rays from a hill above Fort Ware.

Fired by the accounts he had heard, an American traveller, Paul Leland Haworth, set off in 1916 in a canoe with a single companion from Prince George in the south. After weeks of arduous travelling via the Parsnip and Finlay rivers they reached Fort Ware. They then attempted to ascend the Kwadacha River, but progress proved so slow and difficult that they ran out of food and would have starved had they not shot and eaten a bear.

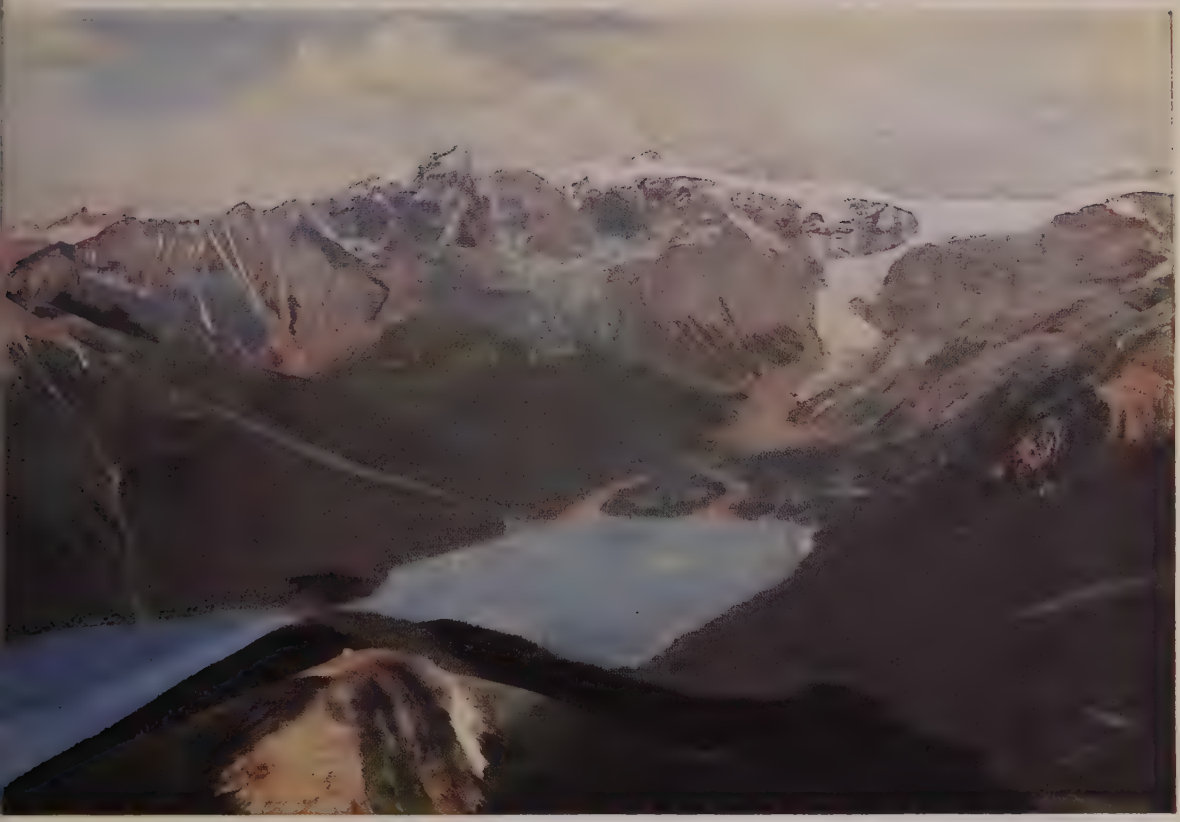
Before retreating, Haworth climbed a mountain side above the river and from it saw a range which included three high and striking peaks surmounting an extensive icefield in the north-east, undoubtedly the same range observed by McConnell and Swannell. This he named the Lloyd George range after the British Prime Minister of whom he was a great admirer.

He returned in 1919 with a stronger party, but made a topographical error. Instead of turning north from the Kwadacha River up its tributary, the Warneford River, he continued to follow the former to the east and so found himself well to the south of the range. Finally he left his party and with a single companion, Dr Chesterfield, pushed north over two subsidiary ranges and through dense

The expedition's base-camp. Left to right: Rex Gibson, Noël Odell, Henry Hall, Nona Smythe, Frank Smythe, John Ross and David Wessel (behind pole). The mess tent, table and benches were home-made



Llanberis Glacier, in the Lloyd George range, descends from the ice-field above in a steep 4000-foot ice-fall to the valley. The trees are Englemann spruce, with an undergrowth of bush willow



(Above) *Haworth Lake (the base-camp lay at its top left edge) and part of the Lloyd George Range*
(Below) *Haworth Lake and (at left) the twin-headed Cloudmaker photographed from Llanberis Glacier*

Anscocolor photographs—plates 2, 3, 4 and 5—by F. S. Smythe

In the calm of evening, Haworth Lake mirrors the surrounding mountains and forests. Sitting by a campfire after dinner, members of the Lloyd George expedition never tired of watching this scene

and difficult forest. Nearly exhausted, and with their provisions running out, they arrived at the southernmost end of the six-miles-long lake now known as Haworth Lake. From the shores of the lake Haworth gazed across its turquoise blue waters on the Promised Land which he had made such great efforts to reach—the Lloyd George Mountains, which supported with their limestone walls a great ice-field. But once again he had no option but to return, this time from the very threshold of his goal.

The only other expedition to approach anywhere near the range was the Bedaux (Citröen) Expedition of 1934, which, with horses, struck north-west from the Peace River and followed the Kwadacha River past the southern end of the range to Fort Ware. This powerfully manned and equipped expedition, which employed large numbers of expert bushmen to cut a passage through the forests, covered much new country.

In 1946, Major Rex Gibson of the Canadian Alpine Club and I discussed the possibility of an expedition to the range. To have proceeded by canoe or pack-horse would have taken far too long and would have left little time for exploration owing to the brief summer in these latitudes. It would also have cost many thousands of dollars, travel of this nature being very expensive in Canada.

There is only one method by which men, food and equipment can be transported quickly, easily and cheaply in such country, and that is by aircraft. When, therefore, I initiated the expedition, arrangements were made with the Central British Columbia Airways for the charter of a float-plane which would land us on Haworth Lake.

The expedition consisted of Henry Hall of Boston, a well-known member of the American Alpine Club, John Ross, President of the Harvard University Mountaineering Club, David Wessel of Montana, Rex Gibson, Dr N. E. Odell of Cambridge, of Everest fame, who came as both mountaineer and geologist, my wife and myself. My wife was cook and general organizer of the expedition, and in both capacities did invaluable work. She also attended to all the "make and mend"

for six men—and the limestone of the Rockies is particularly hard on clothing.

The objects of the expedition were to explore the Lloyd George range and ascend its highest peaks, to make topographical and geological surveys and to collect specimens of the flora, which last was my task.

We came together at Jasper, Alberta, in June 1947, and at the end of the month set off in two parties, one to Fort Nelson on the Alaska Highway and the other to the float-plane base at Fort St James on Stuart Lake, British Columbia.

The Fort St James party, consisting of Hall, Odell, my wife and myself, had an inauspicious start from Jasper as an aircraft crashed on the station as we were about to depart, the pilot being killed. Then the train in front of us ran off the rails, and to complete matters the wrecking train *en route* to salve the wrecked train was itself wrecked. When on the morning of July 2 we eventually arrived at Vanderhoof, our railhead, the omens brightened, for we were met at the station by an energetic and smiling little Welshman who had been waiting for many hours in his taxi to take us to Fort St James on another stage of our journey to the Lloyd George Mountains.

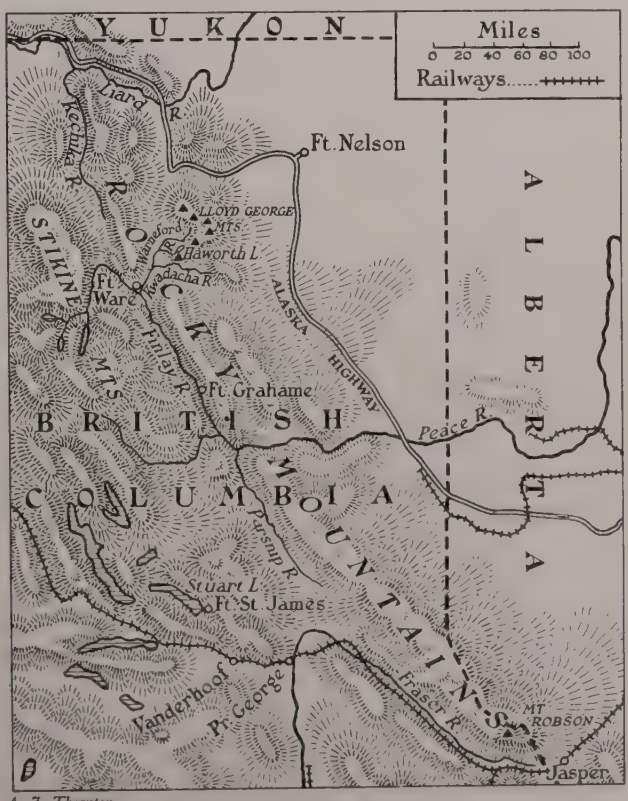
At the station I enquired whether 500 lbs of food had arrived, but the stationmaster was adamant that there was nothing for us. In the end I asked him whether there was *anything* in the parcel rooms. He replied gruffly, "I've told you there's nothing for you; there's only that stuff for a Mr Lloyd George."

When, after a drive of forty-five miles, we arrived at Fort St James the air company professed entire ignorance of us and our flight, though we had been corresponding with them for months and had arranged every detail. It transpired that the managing director, who corresponded with us, had left the firm, and before doing so had placed our correspondence in an envelope labelled 'miscellaneous'. However, our flight was promised for that same day, and after lunch we took off for Haworth Lake, 300 miles to the north, in a single-engined all-metal Junkers float-plane.

Our pilot was Mr Pat Carey, one of those intrepid bush pilots who are doing so much to open up Northern Canada as regards prospecting, mining, lumbering and agriculture. Not for him were the amenities of flying such as radio direction-finding and weather reports. He had to fly by the light of Nature and his own great experience over country largely unmapped (or at best sketchily and at a scale of one in a million) where weather conditions were consistently treacherous and the possibility of a forced landing was always at the back of his mind. If he did make a forced landing he would have to wait and hope for rescue, eat his emergency provisions and endeavour to feed himself with gun and fishing rod. And if he were not found? A great many aircraft have disappeared in this country and no trace of them has ever been discovered.

For the greater part of the flight we were over some of the wildest territory I have seen. We crossed the Finlay River above Fort Grahame, and as we did so saw between the clouds a great sheet of snow shining out of the north; it was our objective, the ice-field of the Lloyd George range eighty miles distant.

Innumerable rocky and snow-capped peaks slipped away beneath us and we gazed down between them into the depths of shadowy forest-filled valleys in which thread-like rivers



A. J. Thornton

(Above) *The Lloyd George massif seen from a mountain immediately above the base-camp. In the centre is the remarkable stagnant glacier, and, rising 5000 feet above it to the left, Mount Glendower. Mount Lloyd George lies beyond the head of the glacier, with Mount Criccieth just peeping above the ice-field to its right. Mount Glendower was climbed from the stagnant glacier via the steep gully which ends in the gap between the mountain and the two subsidiary points on the ridge at the left.* (Left) *Nearing their goal—the summit of Mount Lloyd George*

Mount Glendower photographed from the summit of Mount Lloyd George during a traverse of both in a single da of mountaineering. A massive thunder-cloud was building up at the time, and within an hour the storm brok

Air reconnaissance proved useful in disclosing possible routes to the ice-field and higher peaks of the Lloyd George Range. This aerial photograph shows the three highest peaks: Mount Lloyd—

shimmered. We crossed the Kwadacha River along which Haworth had so manfully struggled. Then the mountains unfolded on one of the loveliest views I have ever seen: Haworth Lake, suddenly revealed, set like an enormous turquoise in a diadem of blue-green forest and golden limestone precipice that lifted on high in the blue heaven a vast field of eternal snow.

Then we were down, a perfect landing by our excellent pilot on the mirror-like surface of the lake. As we stepped ashore we were met by millions of the voracious inhabitants —mosquitoes, the curse of the Canadian North. However, we were well provided with nets and an oil which repelled them for hours.

The base camp was pitched on some mossy ridges a few inches above the muskeg (swamp) that lay between the lake and the mountain-sides, a damp mosquito-infested site, but the only one available. Then we set about making ourselves comfortable: during the next few days trees were felled and benches and a table constructed and, more important still, a kitchen for my wife.

A memorable impression was made by the beauty and grandeur of the forest of Engelmann spruce in which we lived for the next month. It had never been burned and was in its primaeval condition, its towering trees draped with epiphytic mosses and beneath them a tangle of bush willows, alders and Labrador tea, mixed with the dead-fall of countless years. It was obvious also from the colourful mosses and lichens that the country was a wet one and received a heavy annual precipitation of rain and snow.

On July 3 the aircraft, which after landing

All monochrome photographs by F. S. S

—George in the centre, Mount Glendower on the right, and Mount Criccieth on the left, with a portion of the ice-field to the left of them. Some idea is given of the immensity of the area

us had flown on to Fort Nelson, returned with Gibson, Ross and Wessel, and on July 5 with the remainder of our provisions and equipment.

On this last occasion Hall, Odell and I utilized it for a three-hour reconnaissance flight over the surrounding country. Some of its ranges had been observed from the air and the Canadian Topographical Survey, in conscientious pursuit of the system of nomenclature inaugurated by Haworth, had named one range the Churchill and another the Roosevelt; there was also a dark forbidding looking mountain in the neighbourhood of Tuchodi Lake called Mount Stalin.

Half an hour after we landed a heavy storm broke, accompanied by a violent wind squall and torrential rain and hail. We were lucky, so Pat Carey said, to get back, and it was a typical example of the hazards of this kind of flying.

During our flight Gibson, Ross and Wessel had made a reconnaissance to the ice-field up the steep glacier to the north of the camp. They had proceeded some distance along the edge of the ice-field when they were overtaken by the storm already mentioned. So unpleasant was the prospect of retreat across the blizzard-swept ice-field that Gibson, ever a bold and resolute mountaineer, decided to force a route directly down the precipices below the edge of the ice-field—a descent which was only accomplished with the greatest difficulty.

An early discovery was that of a stagnant glacier. Enclosed in a narrow valley between precipices 4000 feet high the ice had lain motionless and practically unmelting for

hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. Debris falling from the cliffs had accumulated on it and now plants and small shrubs and trees were growing there. This is believed to be the only stagnant glacier observed south of Alaska, where it is a common phenomenon.

From the stagnant glacier a route was discovered up the second highest peak of the range, Mount Glendower (9400 feet), and on July 15 this was climbed.

Two days later the whole party, excepting my wife, who volunteered to remain alone at the base camp, set off to climb the highest peak in the range, Mount Lloyd George (9450 feet). It was the first day of good weather we had had. Our route lay up the 4000-foot ice-fall of the steep glacier (Llanberis Glacier), and for an hour we were exposed to the risk of ice avalanches. On the ice-field we found soft, deep and laborious snow, and it was not until ten hours after leaving camp that we arrived on the summit of the peak. It was a happy occasion, for as mountaineers of three nationalities we had pulled together in perfect accord throughout the expedition.

From the summit the view extended over one hundred miles in all directions, and it was interesting to contemplate the many ranges and hundreds of peaks and reflect that not one had been trodden by man.

It took another eight hours to return to camp, which we reached shortly after 10 p.m.

Apart from major ascents we explored the eastern end of the ice-field, which we estimated was about thirty square miles in extent, excluding its subsidiary glaciers, which must considerably increase the total, and climbed a number of peaks. A base line was measured and three survey stations established from one of which Mount Criccieth (9050 feet), the third highest peak, was also climbed.

During this period I made my collection of plants. No new species were found, but the flora, if limited in the number of its species (there are about a hundred), is very colourful. The principal motif was blue and it included lush grasslands massed with such plants as delphinium, lupin, polemonium, mertensia, and monkshood. High up in a kind of mossy tundra grew a host of true Alpines, including saxifrage, pedicularis, cassiope, gentian, and many beautiful almost stemless composites, such as antennaria, artimesia, arnica, erigeron, senecio, and aster. Then, on the lower slopes was the beautiful red and yellow columbine of the Rockies and the famous Indian paintbrush, in its red and yellow forms, splashing the slopes with brilliant colours.

Among the peaks ascended towards the end of July was a fine twin-headed mountain opposite the base camp, which we named the Cloudmaker on account of its tendency to manufacture clouds and storms. In order to reach the foot of it, David Wessel and I utilized a raft we had made, a heavy contraption of four dead trees and a couple of cross-pieces to hold them together. We set off early one morning with three days' provisions, and were peacefully poling and paddling along close to the shores of the lake when, on turning a small cape, we suddenly came on a bear a few yards away seated on the bank. This bear was far larger than a grizzly and light brown in colour. American zoologists later informed us that it was an Alaskan brown bear (of which species there is a fine specimen in the New York Natural History Museum which weighs 1500 lbs and stands about eight feet high).

As soon as he saw us the bear jumped into the water and started to swim straight for the raft, making for the end on which I was balanced astride the logs. I had to turn round to face him and in doing so nearly upset the raft and tipped my companion and myself into the deep ice-cold water. Then, recovering my balance, I yelled at the bear and beat at the water with my paddle intending to scare it off rather than infuriate it. But this was without effect and it still came on. It was now only a yard from the raft, and I raised my paddle again to hit it on the nose as a last resort. But before I could do so it suddenly turned, swam back to the bank, and crashed off into the forest.

Later that day we had two narrow escapes from lightning when sheltering from a thunderstorm near the summit of the Cloudmaker. We were driven down by the storm, cold and soaked to the skin, but after descending 1500 feet recovered our warmth and determination and returned and finished the climb. We got down to timberline in the last of the daylight and sat all night by a fire. My companion summed up our adventuring when he remarked, "Well, Frank, I guess we can call it a day."

Our concluding expedition was a traverse of the two highest peaks of the range in a single journey, one which involved some splendid mountaineering and occupied twenty-two hours.

On July 30 the aircraft returned and transported us back to a world which for a month we had happily and thankfully forgotten.

The Nile

by GORDON WATERFIELD

Exclusive News Agenc

The Nile Delta during the summer floods which bring down the rich silt from the mountains of Abyssinia thousands of miles away; the fellahin depend on these flood-waters to fertilize the land

The author's family has had long connections with Egypt and the Nile. His great-grandmother, Lady Duff Gordon, lived seven years at Luxor and died by the Nile she loved. Her daughter, Janet Ross, lived many years in Egypt and Gordon Waterfield spent seven years as a journalist there

EVERYONE who lives in the great Delta of the Nile, or along the thin thread of cultivation south through the Nubian desert, is dependent on the Nile. Other countries are watered by rain, rivers and springs. Egypt has hardly any rain and only one river, but a remarkable river. It has been for thousands of years the deity to which the peasants have prayed for their daily bread. Without the Nile there would have been no pharaohs to build temples and no Greek philosophers in Alexandria; Cleopatra would not have dallied with Antony and Caesar; the followers of Mohammed would not have built their lovely mosques and the gay Mamelukes would not have jousted and played polo. Egypt would have meant nothing to Napoleon and there would have been no British occupation. There might even have been no Middle East problem. The desert would have stretched across Africa from the Sahara through Libya and Sinai to the Jordan Valley. Apart from a few oases and occasional rainfall it would have been a dead land. The Nile is a young river geologically, but it is the father of one of the oldest civilizations in the world.

The Ancient Egyptians knew almost as much about the Nile as did anyone until the reign of Queen Victoria. They knew the junction of the Blue and White Niles at what is now Khartoum; they knew Abyssinia and Lake Tana whence comes the Blue Nile, but they had been stopped from ascending the White Nile by the great Sudd or swamp area. For 5000 years there were theories about the source of the Nile, and every few centuries or so attempts were made to discover where this great river came from out of the mysterious hinterland of Central Africa. It exercised a fascination over the imagination of men

Sudan Railways

The second of the six cataracts of the Nile between Aswan and Khartoum; it is 124 miles long with a fall of 216 feet and ends just above Wadi Halfa, northern frontier town of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan

through history. Herodotus and Strabo explored the river and Nero sent two expeditions, but none got higher than the great swamp where there are floating islands of matted reeds several miles long and the Nile finds its way by involved channels twenty to fifty feet below. The origins of the White Nile south of the Sudd remained a mystery until the 19th century when one expedition after another plunged into Central Africa to find the source of the river; Mohammed Ali sent expeditions to the swamp area; British, French, Belgians and Germans had a hand in the adventure; finally, in July 1862, Speke stood by the Ripon Falls and knew he had found the source of the Nile as it emerged from the great lake which was later named after Queen Victoria.

That great reservoir steadies the flow of the Nile through half Africa to the sea, about 3500 miles from its source. It has no tributary for the last 1600 miles of its course and it fertilizes a narrow thread of green, sometimes only a mile wide between the desert on either side, until it reaches Cairo, the diamond on the handle of the fan which is the Delta. The base of that huge triangle is about 155 miles long and rests on the Mediterranean, while the two sides, with Cairo as the apex, are each about 100 miles in length. Through the centuries the Nile has built up a rich deposit in the Delta, left in peace by the untidal Mediterranean.

It is one of the paradoxes of Egypt—one that intrigued Herodotus—that the Nile flood comes down through the Sudan and Egypt in the heat of summer when most rivers of the world recede. Owing to the rains in the tropics of Central Africa and the melting of the snows on the great Ruwenzori Range, the White Nile nearly trebles the volume of its flow between May and October; while the Blue Nile, as a result of the heavy rains on the Abyssinian Highlands, rises from 200 cubic metres to 6000 cubic metres per second, an increase of thirty times the volume. The life of the Sudan and of Egypt depends upon that great flood water coming down. Indeed, the height of the flood is so important that it has been carefully recorded each year for over

5000 years, ever since 3600 B.C. It means poverty or plenty throughout the Nile Valley —the periods represented by the lean kine and the fat kine of the Bible story.

> The higher Nilus swells,
> The more it promises; as it ebbs the seedsman
> Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,
> And shortly comes to harvest.

There is a second extremely important characteristic of the Nile—its fertilizing power. The heavy rains of early summer sweep the fertile mineral particles from the volcanic mountains of Abyssinia in a great flood northwards to the Mediterranean.

I have seen the deep black soil on the high Ethiopian plateau which gives several crops a year so easily that the Abyssinians do not bother to cultivate the land properly. I looked at that wild, unfarmed country where the proud Abyssinians, followed by their retainers, bestride their mules with the haughtiness of ragged princes; and then I thought of Egypt with its flat, patch-work fields, where the fellah spends his days bent in careful tilling. Particles of the same black soil on which I stood in Abyssinia would in time be carried several thousands of miles in turbulent flood to give Egypt her rich green fields. I was reminded how the Nile flood comes down in the summer each year and there are shouts of joy as the steep waters rush through the Sudan and Egypt. And the fellah puts on his best clothes and makes *fantasia* in honour of the Nile God, spending the rest of the year coaxing the precious water through the parched land.

The rhythm of the Nile is the rhythm of life in Egypt. In giving life it creates its own life. The climate, the fauna and the people have, on the whole, altered little since the Ancient Egyptians drew their pictures of contemporary life in such fascinating detail; only the camel and the water-buffaloes are new. The carvings and paintings of five or six thousand years ago show the same type of peasant farmer that you see today, working in the fields with the same instruments which can be seen carved on the towering walls of the ancient temples. Down the centuries there were newcomers from Greece and other areas of the Mediterranean; the followers of Mohammed swept across Arabia and settled in this hospitable valley. Many of these peoples retain their racial features, but those who have worked for generations by the Nile absorb customs and characteristics which have persisted for thousands of years.

It is true that on the ancient temples you

A. J. Thornton

All photographs, except two, by F. G. Huckles

(Above) *Breaking clods with a primitive harrow—near Cairo.* (Left) *Nile mud after the water has receded.* (Opposite) *Near the Nile bank there is no room for the* saqiya, *or water-wheel, and so the* shaduf *is used. Between palm-tree uprights is a weight made of dried mud; as the fellah pulls this up, the bucket he is holding will be lowered to the Nile. The bank is high and there will be at least one more shaduf, perhaps two, being worked below him, bringing the water up by stages—a slow process*

(Opposite) *The man on the plank encourages still more passengers to board his ferry—though the policeman is supposed to be there to see that the boat is not overcrowded! Every year many are drowned aboard capsized ferries.* (Above) *Unloading bundles of palm fronds from a barge at Cairo; the soft mid-rib is used for making crates for the transport of poultry and fruit.* (Right) *Wheat sacks on a Cairo quay. The large designs embroidered on their sides enable illiterate porters to distinguish them according to owners*

A small Egyptian village (the Citadel of Cairo is seen in the background). The houses of mud and brick are built beside a canal which supplies water for irrigation as well as for domestic uses

can see other types which have not become Delta types. There are the slaves captured in the south and dragged in chains behind the conquering Pharaoh. They are still there in the upper reaches of the Nile, with a different physique because of the different conditions. The giant Shilluks and Dinkas, sometimes seven feet tall, need long legs for the swampy region of the Nile where they live; and there are those whom Speke described as "the true curly-headed, flat-nosed, pouch-mouthed negro". In the south live numerous tribes and races as different from the Delta native as is the Nile itself in the various areas through which it passes. They have strange traditions of their own, untouched by the civilization of Ancient Egypt, which have lasted thousands of years and form much of the case-history of Fraser's *Golden Bough*.

More books have been written about the Nile and its people than about any other river. One bold writer, Emil Ludwig, tried to write the biography of the Nile. But he found that the life round its head-waters and along its banks was so varied and strange that he kept wandering off into digressions. Travellers pass through and write hurried accounts which often send a shiver down the spine of the Sudan official, who feels he knows little even after living long among them.

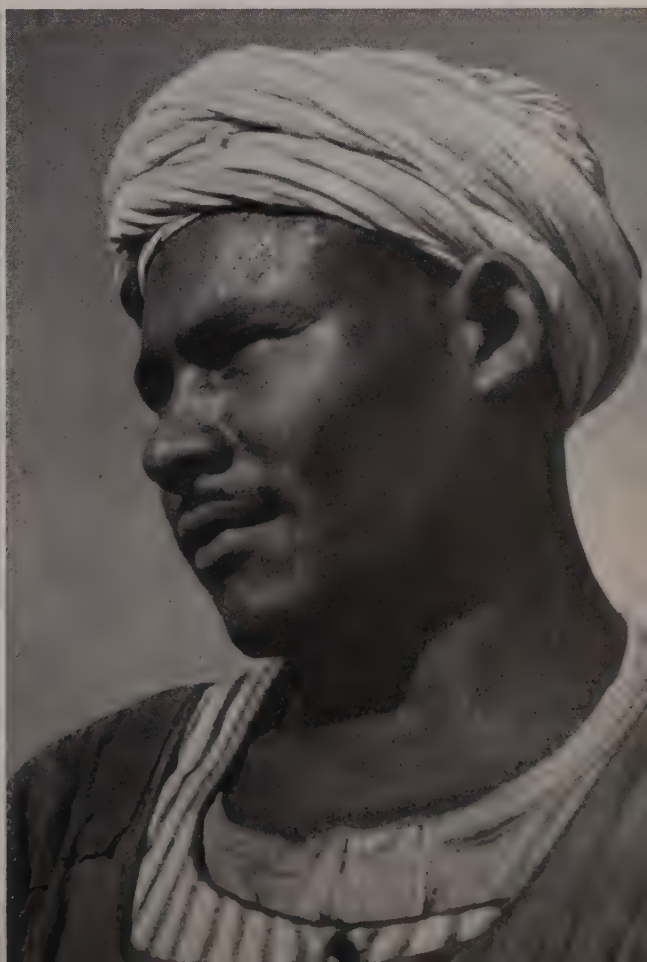
I, too, had better keep to that part of the Nile I know in the Delta. While working at a cotton-ginning factory I used to ride along the Nile at dawn and through the villages along the canal banks. Here is to be found the ancient life of Egypt, the farmer's life close to Nile water and mud. Every acre of ground is cultivated—lucerne, maize, cotton and wheat; there are often as many as four crops in the year. Human and animal life is as fecund as the black earth. The villages are alive with chickens, pigeons, donkeys and

camels, while men, women and children are thick on the ground, tilling their crops. These are carried away along the canals or down the Nile in the huge sailing boats. So flat is the country that only the white sails of the feluccas, the minarets, palm-trees and tamarisks stand up in the landscape; even the square houses, mostly made of mud and cow-dung, seem to be part of the fields. Sometimes along a canal bank there is the silhouette of a large Egyptian perched on the hind quarters of a donkey, holding a black umbrella above his head; or there is a string of camels, carrying huge bundles with their long necks rhythmically swaying; or again perhaps a man and woman going to their village with their child riding a donkey. Here is Ancient Egypt, Herodotus, the *Thousand and One Nights* and the Bible; it is a palimpsest of them all.

There is the Bible at every turn. "Yesterday", wrote Lucie Duff Gordon, "I saw a camel go through the eye of a needle—i.e., the low arched door of an enclosure; he must kneel and bow his head to creep through—and thus the rich man must humble himself. See how a false translation spoils a good metaphor and turns a familiar simile into a ferociously communist sentiment." Lady Duff Gordon understood the people of the Nile better than do many. "To most Europeans the people are not real people but part of the landscape", she wrote again. "I sit among the people and I know that Mohammed feels just like John Smith or Tom Brown would feel in his place. . . If anyone tries to make you believe any bosh about civilization in Egypt, laugh at it. The real life and the real people are exactly as described in the most veracious of all books, the *Thousand and One Nights.*" I quote from Lady Duff Gordon's *Letters from Egypt;* that book was my guide when I first went to Egypt and little has changed from the 1860's when she wrote.

There has, however, been this change.

(Left) *An Egyptian peasant girl; in their youth these girls are quick and gay, but as they grow older hard work takes the life out of them.* (Right) *A fellah with Arab and Negro blood in his veins*



Since the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the population, which was then nearly seven millions, almost doubled in the next thirty-five years and has gone on increasing by about one and a half millions every ten years. The Delta has become one of the most populated areas of the world and the water from the Nile has to be canalized long distances. Herodotus, writing nearly five hundred years before Christ, remarked that the silt left by the Nile flood gradually increased the height of the Delta, and he thought there would come a time when the Nile would no longer be able to flow over the corn-lands. In fact, the increase in the height of the Nile alluvium is estimated to be only about four and a half inches in a century. The work of getting the Nile water to the fields is helped by the huge mile-long barrages, but the fellah has to carry on his never-ending fight against the desert monster, which is ever ready to devour and lay waste as far as the unconquered Nile.

On those rides in the early morning, often the only sound I used to hear across the fields was the creak of the *saqiya* as the big wooden wheel brought up the water in its buckets. Round and round in a circle for about twelve hours a day walks a camel, or a water-buffalo or a donkey, blindfolded to prevent dizziness. The men, women and children are busy in the fields alongside, intent and silent. They stand for hours in Nile mud, many of them weakened by the bilharzia worm which lives in these stagnant canals. In the evening they go back to their villages. Then the land takes on a new life. The Nile withdraws, shrouded in mist, and the fellahin leave its mud for the well-stamped earth of the village streets and the hard earth floors of the houses. The cattle, donkeys, camels and chickens and ducks are driven into safety and the men go out to the village coffee-shop. They sit sipping their coffee with a noisy intake so as to inhale it at the same time, and they pass round the *nargileh* or hubble-bubble, sucking the smoke up through a bowl of water; they listen to the musician with his one-stringed instrument intoning an endless love song and they discuss the latest gossip: how old Mohammed has rejuvenated himself at the age of seventy by marrying his seventh wife who has given him a twentieth child (children of either sex are useful for they can tend the cattle, pick the cotton and work in the ginning factories). Perhaps, as so often happens, someone with the evil eye has cast a spell on a neighbour. Strange things can occur in these quiet villages, for the world of *djinns* and *afreets* is very near, in fact just outside the bright circle made by the lights of the coffee-shop. And there is a stream of fears, beliefs and customs handed down from Ancient Egypt and joined by others from Christianity and Islam.

If there is no interesting local gossip these peasants of the Nile start a political discussion. Though they may not read, someone has probably come in from the nearest town with a newspaper which he declaims aloud, or the postman on his bicycle has come with news. Talk and argument quicken their wits and they are fairly well informed about what is going on in the outside world. Egyptian politics becomes an absorbing subject to all who live in the Delta. In those village coffee-shops there is much discussion now about the "unity of the Nile Valley". This is a subject after their peasant hearts, for this is their water, their Nile on which they depend, soul and body. While the British have been in the Sudan the flow of Nile water has been improved, but supposing (some Egyptians say) the Sudanese had self-government, would they look after the water? That is one of the questions being asked. Then Egyptian politics link up with many things in the outside world: Palestine and America and the oil of the Middle East and Russia. Probably they are a little confused about Russia and they note that the people who seem to fear Communism most are the wealthy pashas, who have never done anything very much to help the fellahin. They are on the whole desperately poor and so far have made little use of politics to better their own conditions. Another son of the soil may rise to be a great political leader like Saad Zaghlul and fight, not for national independence, for that has been achieved, but for economic independence of the individual. The fellahin know that there is another, very different life that goes on in the Nile Delta. They watch it a little open-mouthed and wondering in Cairo, Alexandria and other big towns. There is the life of the pashas with their large motor-cars, the rich cotton-brokers, the well-dressed tourists with their unveiled women and the jostling mass of Greeks, Italians, Syrians, Maltese and others selling goods and shouting at each other in the Alexandria cotton-market. These townee Egyptians know little of the Nile; they haven't stood half their lives in its mud or cajoled its waters along the canals. Yet all these people along the crowded streets of Cairo and Alexandria, the porters, the messenger boys and the women in their *yashmaks* on their way to market depend on the Nile for their living. The Nile remains their God.

Provençal Sheep-Drive

Notes and Photographs by ÉDOUARD MOURIQUAND

Twice a year, in the spring and autumn, large flocks of sheep may be seen on the move in the South of France. The soil in many parts of Provence, too valuable for grazing, is used to much greater advantage for the cultivation of vegetables; in late April or May, therefore, the sheep leave their winter quarters, take to the roads, and travel for a week or longer in order to reach their summer pastures high up in the French Alps, sometimes climbing to the foot of a glacier 6000 feet above sea-level; and here they remain until the return of colder weather. These flocks are frequently very large, each comprising as many as 3000 or more animals

Whenever possible, the sheep of Provence travel along the smaller country roads on their way to the Alps, to avoid blocking the main streets, for their pace is slow; they may have many scores of miles to cover, and so make the journey in easy stages, nibbling as they go. Despite the large size of each flock, three skilled—

–shepherds with their dogs suffice to guide it on its way: one at the head, a second at the side to check ragglers, and a third at the rear in a donkey-drawn cart carrying personal possessions and weak animals. Above) *In the heat of the afternoon a flock halts on a village green, one of the shepherds mounting guard*

Before settling down for the night round their camp-fire, the shepherds guiding the sheep of Provence to their summer pastures in the Alps have many duties to perform. Years of practice have made them expert in getting hold of any one they want very rapidly: seizing a hind-leg is an effective and entirely painless way of—

—dealing with a recalcitrant ram. All that is damaged is his dignity, which, as a leader of the flock, he likes to maintain on every occasion. The elaborate hand-carved wooden collar supports a bell which helps the shepherds to locate their sheep at sundown if they have wandered afar in search of fresh Alpine grazing land

After a week or more of travelling, this flock from Provence reaches its summer quarters at the foot of the Glacier de l'Etendard, high up in the French Alps. The long trek is over, but not so the duties of the shepherds, who must set to work and build or repair enclosures into which the sheep are driven at night-time—

—after having spent the day roaming from pasture to pasture, attended only by highly skilled dogs, who not only guard the flock, but fetch their masters to lost or injured animals. The shepherds take a great pride in their sheep (each of which is marked with its owner's initials) and enjoy showing them off to any visitors

Having hurt his paw, a sheepdog puppy has fallen by the wayside in the French Alps, but is found by a shepherd's daughter and carried back. The men's families usually join them in the summer huts, staying on there until All Saints' Day approaches, when, once again, the sheep of Provence are driven down to their villages

Positano

by WILLIAM SANSOM

Mr Sansom is the author of a forthcoming travel book : South—Aspects and Images from Corsica, Italy and Southern France, *to be published by Hodder & Stoughton. Previous works include* Something Terrible, Something Lovely *and a war history*, Westminster in War

A SOFTLY coned erection of domed bee-hive houses; precipitous limestone crags grey above, crowned with white cloud; curiously tall chickens; fishermen, some still in pale yellow or scarlet caps; vines encircling and trellising housewalls, but never too lush, for the houses are white; oranges, green in August, looked down upon from a high terrace against the classic sea; soot-faced charcoal porters climbing down from Montepertuso three quarters of a mile above, great baskets on their heads; octopus out on the rocks, cactus growing up the hill—but pink oleander and softer flowers too; Easter processions of white-masked figures bearing a painted effigy of Christ; fig-leaves like giant shamrock, uncut palms like broken Venetian blinds, boats, wine, sun, lizards, lemons, nuts, bats . . . such are some of the intimacies of Positano, Italian fishing town, 1500 inhabitants, province of Salerno, remote on the south side of the Sorrentine peninsula.

These are the intimacies, but with many places the approach must always remain as significant as the town itself. Every town is in some degree an oasis in the desert of arrival and departure. From metropolitan Naples, a steamer across the bay to Sorrento. The steep zig-zag climb to the Piano di Sorrento. Then into a small carrozza, no more than a wooden trap, for the mountain drive across the peninsular arm. Sorrento left behind, and a country of oranges, olives, lemons, vines—drawing away among these fertile edifices of fruit, life becomes slower and slower, the predatory colossus of Naples recedes, slower and slower until the fruits themselves disappear and over the high mountain saddle there is entered a land of primaeval stone; occasionally a hard-put vineyard, a scattering of wind-gnarled olives; far beneath, the mill-pond sea and set in its silent blue the three islets called Galli, once called Syrenusae, once strained at from his mast by bound Ulysses.

One is already in a kind of postcard region. That is to say, travelling along a high winding road halfway up the almost sheer mountain-cliff, and later in Positano itself, which is built in a vertical sense against its mountain-inlet, one feels part of a flat picture: elsewhere there are long perspectives to traverse, horizontal hidden depths to penetrate—but here one is part of the perpendicular, a slight embossment on the face of the postcard.

The drive may take an hour. But well before the end a high promontory is rounded and the curious white domes of Positano can be seen lying far away beneath and along the postcard face. The descending pale-edged road snakes endlessly down towards the town, but now the downhill pace increases. Now along the flat of the postcard one can judge the shallow depth of that sea-bound mountain gorge up which Positano climbs. A solid weight of mountain to one side, to the other the sea running nearly parallel—only biting a shallow crescent, no deep horseshoe, to make a haven for this settlement of man.

The important industry is fishing. Daily and nightly the boats drawn up on the narrow beach put out for the fisheries straight beyond. At night the horizon is promenaded with lights from these and the boats of Amalfi down the coast: as a child in England might remember his nursery ceiling at night glowing with fire-shadow, so the young *Positanese* will stare up at his dusk-white domed ceiling and see travel across it in phantom silence the strange slow light of a fisher-boat passing against the window and out to sea. The shallow grey sand and shingle beach is devoted to the boats, single-sailed craft with raised prows; their good weather-washed whites and blues are dragged high from the water, as years ago when this was a flourishing Angevin port the heavier trading craft were rolled up the beach. It is seldom 'fishy' in the sense of northern ports, there is no smell, it is dry and sunned—but sometimes the whole grey sand is covered with the brown rust of nets drying, and furled nets will walk about the beach like dreadful tweedledum creatures with a fisherman's legs beneath. However, there is a decadence in the industry since other times, and though it is still the mainstay of this little town, there are the signs of a bathing establishment, rafia awnings on the beach, the toadstool growth of parasols by the sea's edge, a small tourist office and a couple of craft-shops. But this is not yet obtrusive.

From the sea comes strange fruit. Octopus whose tentacles are served red and boiled, great sea-turtles, long-feelered cuttle-fish, a thin-snouted fish whose bones against the white flesh prove to be bright viridian; and less exotic companions, such as tunny and sardine. And from the sea, strange weather: for such a sun-washed place must not be viewed always in the sun, great rainstorms and great thunder come. Rain-clouds may burst beyond the Siren Isles, come gliding in vertical downpour inshore, so that one moment the islands are there, and the next are enveloped and gone; inshore, visible as a sharply delineated white curtain, until the dwarf headland is gone—and then the beach and the houses fade in deluge. Every gully and channel in the cliff becomes a spouting gargoyle, the river rises like an animal from its dry bed, out into the cloud-greyed sea there smears a vast fan of yellow mud. An hour, two hours perhaps, and it may have passed. Then the town is drowned with water. The boats tanked with water. Leaves battered down with water. But there is the sun again and, steaming, life resumes.

Up from the beach rise acutely the tiers of pale and bright white houses. Most of these are roofed with shallow stone domes in Saracen fashion: wide arches to the paved terraces of houses proclaim their Arab descent; there predominates here in the veins of the people —just north of 40° latitude—a strong dark blood of Africa. The Greeks may once have been here (Paestum lies a few miles down the coast), Roman colonists have left a row of granite temple pillars, the Normans once sweated in their chainmail, there were years of Spanish rule under the Aragonese. But though traces of the Angevin and Spaniard still show, the stronger blood of the African seafarer prevails. As in the peoples' faces, so in the shape of their houses. The Saracen dome is still used in modern building, for timber is scarce.

The town is not as rich in various dynastic residue as others along the coast, as Ravello with its towered Villa Rufolo, as Paestum with its ancient temple: but as an unspoiled, homogeneous edifice of houses its beauty is composite, the whole is the living and beautiful relic. From sea-level one climbs up among the houses by rock-hewn steps, several such pathways traversing steeply the rising labyrinth. The effect is one of saltation—one moment there is the beach, then obscurity in a stone-walled alley of houses, and at the next one glimpses the sea suddenly many feet below; one has risen with magic effort. Oranges, vines, lemons, olives, figs, tomatoes are cultivated in small sunward-sloping gardens; decorative cacti occur, sapphire-leaved or green and pimpled with red fruit; a horrendous burgeoning of purple bougainvillea may suddenly flare like tinsel among the quieter plants; but for all this, the feeling is solidly mineral, of stone and plastered stone, of white walls and the cut of dark windows, never of a huddling together, but always of a smooth economic cohesion. The houses grow firmly from the rock, they do not squat precariously like square modern villas. Some kitchens and store-rooms are excavated into the rock itself through the back walls, rock-roofed caves. There is a soft geometry of sloping walls and angled buttressing; the whole comes moulded from the cliff's own certitude: it is as slabbed as if first it had been cut from a soft white cheese substance, like mozzarella, and afterwards in the sun hardened. And there is none of the darkness of northern Italian labyrinthine building—not more than two or three floors to a house, and all washed by the sea-breeze.

Such steep tracks are the intimate ascent, the fisherman's way. But there is the road, too, the road that curves and hairpins downwards to end abruptly in the centre of the lower town. From there onwards no traffic. Here in the centre lies one eccentricity, an old crumbled-plaster baroque palace, obscured by its own wall and the natural growth of cottage houses. Further on, towards the beach and on it, stands the only other architecture of individual presence, the green-domed church. A large motherly basilica, it stands sea-shrined, a light crowning the dome scaled with green tiles, a parent among its brood of outward and upward lying human houses.

The church is of the Virgin Mary of Positano. Shrines to this deity are many through the alleys and passages of the town. She is pictured floating above the sea with the infant Christ in her arms, the feet just seen at the tip of her robe that slenders away in roughly fish-tail proportion. One cannot dismiss the unconscious allusion of a mermaid figure: and this must be as deeply possible as it appears. There are two remembered legends of the Virgin, and of the beginnings of Positano. One speaks of a pirate ship driven by tempest along the shores, in great danger of foundering. All was felt lost, when through the wind came the sound of a woman's voice crying: "*Posa! Posa!*" (Put down!). The tiller was turned inshore and the ship came safely to rest in the haven of Positano. On land the sailors found a wooden image of the Madonna, and attributed to it the mysterious voice that

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Positano, Italian fishing town, lies on the Tyrrhenian between the peninsula of Sorrento and Amalfi

had spoken from the waves. They built a shrine to commemorate their salvation.

But a second account tells of a time when Positano was already established, and of a day when a pirate ship was seen making along the coast intent on pillaging the coastal towns. As the ship neared Positano, again a voice spoke from the waves. Again the words drifted over the sea: "*Posa! Posa!*" And like a stone the ship sank to the bottom, put down by the miraculous agency of Positano's protective Lady of the Sea. Both accounts, of course, are in detail false, though thematically of ancient significance. Paestum's other name was Posidania. Poseidon the sea-god was worshipped here. Other deities dwelled in the magic environment of those ancient seas—the Sirens. Always, in harmony with the fruit of the sea, and in consonance with its elemental mystery and power, God for the fisher-peasant came from the sea.

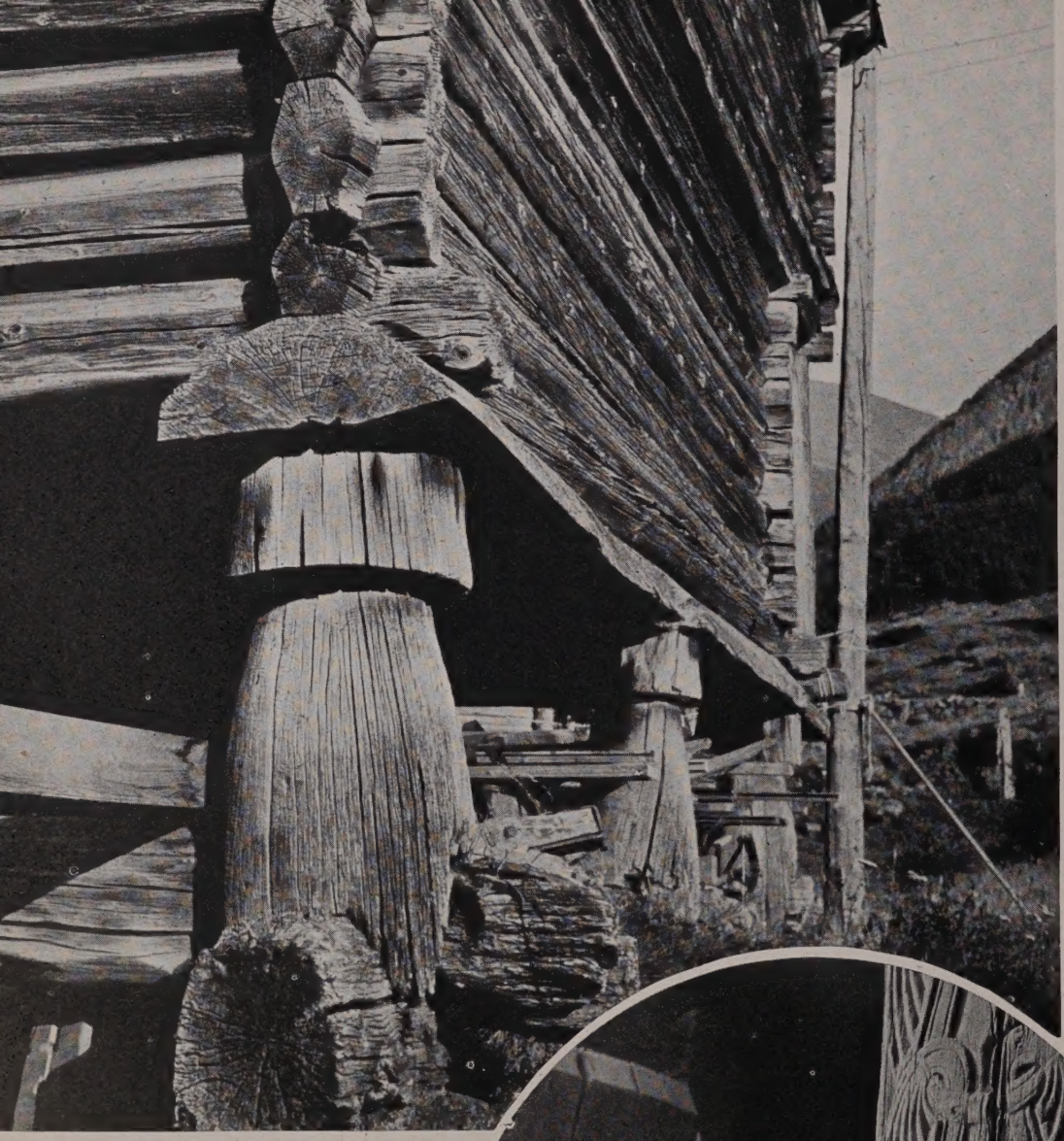
Inescapably there rests over all the landscape here an ancient radiance: the rule may be Italian, the blood more Saracen, but still there persists the feeling of ancient Greece. It may be associative—one knows of the first colonization, of the passing of Ulysses, of Palinurus drowned to the south and of Aeneas' landing to the Neapolitan north. But intrinsically there seems to be an ambience of golden days over this pure sapphiric sea, over the grey limestone cliffs, over the islands.

There is a sense that the land and its life is not only slow, but ancient. That, though the day-to-day talk may be for the moment of inflated prices and conflicting policies, ordinary conceptions of humanity are still super imposed on an older order of life. But an order that went before even the first ideas of 'happiness' and 'misery' were formed: as old as the vitalities that preceded these, the spilling of golden plenty and the thunderbolt of punishment.

Norway's Wood Architecture

Notes and Photographs
by ROSEMARY GILLIAT

Describing a Nordic forest, Karel Capek wrote: "... it stands on millions of stems but it is one wall, one sheet, one extremely long green wave rolling south from the Arctic Circle for six hundred miles". With this limitless material around him the Scandinavian has, naturally enough, built extensively with wood. (Opposite) *The 12th-century wooden church at Borgund is the most interesting of the twenty-five remaining stave churches. Its steep roofs, with dragons' heads, have been copied in the restoration of Gol church* (above), *brought from the Hallingdal and re-erected in the open-air museum near Oslo.* (Right) *These ancient church doorways in Oslo University Museum are carved with intricate designs representing mythical animals, figures from the sagas, and pagan deities*



(Above) *A close-up showing details of construction of a loft in Bøverdal, Norway. The wooden supports are of an unusual shape, being designed to prevent the entry of rats and mice, on the same principle as the stone 'mushrooms' used for farm outbuildings in many districts of England.* (Right) *A loft 'ladder'—hewn out of a single massive tree-trunk. On the right is some of the ornamental carving on the corner of a neighbouring farm-house*

(Above) *The old wooden buildings of Norwegian towns have suffered much damage by fire. Brick, steel and concrete are gradually replacing timber but in Bergen there are still districts (for example, this street in the Nordnaes quarter) where all the houses are weather-boarded.* (Right) *Peasant architecture has long been highly developed in the country. The Hallingdal farm building here shown probably dates from early in the 17th century*

(Left) *Ships are still built beside the fjords of Norway, as in Viking days. It is an impressive sight to travel along the narrow Fjaerlandsfjord and see the stark white ribs of a fishing vessel jutting up in sharp relief against the dark landscape.* (Below) *Countless mountain streams and rivers provide water power for generating Norway's electricity. This simple wooden bridge in the Bøverdal has foundations of concrete to withstand the great pressure of water from melting snow in the springtime*